REMARKS:

In the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner rejected claims 1-10 and 17-22. Claims 1, 17, 19, and 21-22 are amended herein, and new claim 23 is added. Claims 11-16 remain cancelled. No new matter is presented. Thus, claims 1-10 and 17-23 are pending and under consideration. The rejections are traversed below.

REJECTION UNDER 35 U.S.C. §103(a):

Claims 1-10 and 17-22 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent Application US2002/0002502 (Maes) and U.S. Patent No. 6,912,505 (Linden).

On page 6 of the outstanding Office Action, the Examiner asserts that FIGS. 3 and 4 of Maes disclose "generating article picture arrangement data in which article pictures similar to each other in the features are disposed at close positions, as search results of the article data." However, FIG. 3 of Maes shows a state in which a random sampling is displayed to a user who is going to purchase a car (see, paragraph 113). For example, when the user selects a picture of any car by clicking on the picture of the car, cars having features similar to those of the car of the selected picture are searched for, and are displayed (see, FIG. 4 and corresponding text). That is, the arrangement of the pictures displayed in FIG. 4 of Maes is not related to similarity of attributes of the products displayed in the arrangement but instead is related to attribute values of a chosen one of the products (see, paragraph 114).

The Examiner acknowledges that Maes does not disclose displaying an article picture with a higher data sending rank earlier in the arrangement position, but relies of Linden as teaching the same. However, Linden is directed to monitoring user browsing activities that indicate user interests in particular products based on a history of products browsed by the user. In Linden, a similar items list indicates the relatedness of items to a particular popular item based on sales of the items for generating recommendations for the user (see, col. 11, line 61 through col. 12, line 12 and col. 13, line 59 through col. 14, line 6). That is, the sorting of items in Linden is based on similarity of items to a particular popular item and likely interest of the user based on previous purchase history.

In contrast, the present invention considers the similarity of articles among a plurality of article pictures retrieved as a search result and positions pictures of the articles similar to each other close to each other among the plurality of article pictures, while positioning pictures of articles that are not similar to each other far away from each other.

For example, among the plurality of article pictures resulting form a search request, pictures of the articles having features similar to each other are displayed in a screen such that the pictures of the articles having the similar features form a small group (see, FIG. 3 and corresponding text of the present application).

Independent claim 1, by way of example, recites "generating article picture arrangement data in which, among a plurality of article pictures of search results, the more similar article pictures are in the features, the more closely the article pictures are disposed, as search results of the article data." Claim 1 further recites, "displaying an article picture with a higher data sending rank earlier at the arrangement position." Independent claims 17 and 19 also recite similar features of claim 1.

Independent claim 21 recites, "assigning a data sending rank relating at least one feature of an article to at least one feature of other articles" and "generating article picture arrangement data having article pictures of articles with features similar to each other disposed at close positions", where "article pictures of the articles with features similar to each other are disposed in closest proximity to each other compared to other article pictures."

Independent claim 22 recites, "displaying article images of the article search results in accordance with the ranking so that article images corresponding to articles with similar features are positioned to be in adjacent positions among the displayed article images."

Maes and Linden, alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest a method and system that takes into account similarities of articles to dispose articles with similar features "more closely" (claims 1, 17 and 19), "in closest proximity" (claim 21) and "in adjacent positions" (claim 22).

It is submitted that the independent claims are patentable over Maes and Linden.

For at least the above-mentioned reasons, claims depending from the independent claims are patentably distinguishable over Maes and Linden. The dependent claims are also independently patentable. For example, claim 2, "the features of the article are any one selected from the group consisting of features of an article picture of the article, a keyword representing the features of the article, and article classification information regarding classification of the article in accordance with the features thereof, or a combination thereof" (see also, claims 18 and 20). Maes and Linden, alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest features of these dependent claims.

Therefore, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

NEW CLAIM:

New claim 23 is added to emphasize that the present invention includes, "sorting images of articles retrieved in response to an article search request and positioning images corresponding to articles having similar features in close proximity." Then, the sorted images of the articles are provided to the user as a search result, where "the articles having similar features are displayed as a unified group based on said sorting." This enables a user to view articles considered to be of likely interest first without requiring the user to go through all the images displayed to find those of interest.

The cited reference, alone or in combination, do not teach or suggest, "positioning images corresponding to articles having similar features in close proximity" and displaying the articles having similar features as "a unified group", as recited in new claim 23.

Therefore, it is respectfully submitted that new claim 23 is patentably distinguishable over Maes and Linden.

CONCLUSION:

There being no further outstanding objections or rejections, it is submitted that the application is in condition for allowance. An early action to that effect is courteously solicited.

Finally, if there are any formal matters remaining after this response, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned to attend to these matters.

If there are any additional fees associated with filing of this Amendment, please charge the same to our Deposit Account No. 19-3935.

Respectfully submitted,

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